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ABSTRACT

Intended for use by parents of children and youth with disabilities, this guide offers guidelines for planning for a smooth transition into a new special education placement necessitated by a family move. The question-answer format addresses such questions as the following: "Will the school in my new neighborhood offer special education programs?"; "How can I learn more about the federal laws and regulations?"; "How can I learn about the state laws and regulations?"; "When should I start this process?"; "Why get in touch with parent or disability groups?"; "What about early intervention and preschool programs?"; "What about high school students' transition and work opportunities?"; "What do I do about Supplemental Security Income benefits?"; "What if we are a military family?"; "What do I do with all these records?"; "Should I mail the records to the new school?"; "Should I pack the records?"; "How do I keep all these records, meetings, eligiblity requirements and letters straight?"; "How long will it take to get my child settled into the new school?"; and "What if there are problems, if my child's placement is delayed, or if I disagree with the placement?". A checklist of common planning tasks is included. (DB)

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A PARENT'S GUIDE

Planning a Move: Mapping Your Strategy

Volume I Number 3 September, 1990

Moving to a new location disrupts your life! For any family this can be a time of chaos. There is the adventure of newness but also a maddening confusion. Everything and everyone is certainly somewhere, but where? You have to find new grocery stores, new roads, new schools and new doctors. You have to unpack and reorganize your home and your daily routine. You have to make new friends, meet new neighbors and establish new systems of support and help.

For a family with a child who has special needs, the confusion can be particularly stressful. To avoid some of the less desirable "adventures," it may be a good idea to map out your strategy before you move. This is especially important regarding school and your child's special education needs. Presented here are some questions you should ask yourself, preferably well in advance of your move. The answers given contain suggestions for helping your family make a smooth change from your child's present special education placement to the new one. These suggestions were derived from personal experience, contact with families who have met the "challenge," advice from administrators, and other authorities and research.

Q: Will the school in my new neighborhood offer special education programs?

A: Yes. There are several federal laws which require all schools to provide a free appropriate public education to all children, regardless of handicapping condition. The federal laws establish the minimum requirements for each state to follow; the states then develop their own education laws and regulations. Different states may use different words to describe certain disabilities or programs, they may have differing eligibility requirements, they may have different processes of evaluation and placement, some states may offer programs not available in other states, rural regions may have different systems for providing special education than suburban or urban areas, but they all offer the same basic services. The Bureau of Indian Affairs has its established guidelines for providing educational services to Indian children with disabilities. The federal laws are the basic standards for all the states' and Bureau of Indian Affairs' special education policies. While some geographic areas may have a wider variety of programs than others, they all must meet the minimum requirements set by the federal government.

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Compiled By:
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703/893-6061 (LOCAL/VOICE); 703/893-8614 (TDD ONLY); or 800/999-5599 (TOLL FREE)

Q: How can I learn more about these federal laws and regulations?

A: You can get a free copy of NICHCY's News Digest on federal laws important to the education of children and youth with special needs. (Call the toll free line to request a copy: 1-800-999-5599.) You may be able to get books and articles about legislation for people with disabilities from your local public library, from your local special education department, from your school district's professional library, from parent groups, and from disability groups. The primary law concerned with education of children and youth with disabilities is called the ***Education of All Handicapped Children Act*** (Public Law 94-142) and its amendments (Public Law 98-199) and the amendments for early intervention and early childhood programs (Public Law 99-457). There is also ***Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973,*** which assures the civil rights of persons with disabilities. For information about vocational education, read about the ***Carl D. Perkins Act of 1984***.

Q: How can I learn about the state laws and regulations?

A: Each state publishes information about special education in their state. You can contact the State Department of Education, Special Education Division, and request a copy of their policies and procedures. If your child is an infant or toddler (ages birth to 2), you will need to contact the Part H Coordinator or lead agency for early intervention programs. In some states the Department of Education is also the lead agency, but in other states it may be the Department of Health or Human Resources. For information on the address of the State Department of Education, Part H Coordinator or the lead agency for the state to which you will be moving, contact NICHCY for a ***State Resource Sheet***. (Call 1-800-999-5599 and tell us which state sheet(s) you need.) The State Resource Sheet also contains names and addresses of parent groups and disability organizations in the state.

Q: When should I start this process?

A: The most important step is to start early. As soon as you know or are seriously considering moving to a new state, you can start to get ready. You may not know which town or school district you will live in, but as long as you know the state you can begin.

If you are moving to another location in the same state, much of this information is still important. Even within a state, different school districts may vary in their policies and programs.

Q: What do I do first?

A: Check all your child's records. Is the Individualized Education Program (IEP) or the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) current or is another one due soon? If there should be a new IEP/IFSP about the time you plan to move, request that the new IEP/IFSP be written earlier to facilitate your child's placement in the new school. If you request the IEP/IFSP several months in advance, your current school should not have a problem moving the meeting up. You want to be sure to schedule this meeting at least 6 weeks before you will move, so there will be time to get the information finalized and have copies of the new IEP/IFSP signed and ready for the new school or early intervention program.

Is a triennial due this year? If yes, again contact your child's current school well in advance of the move and request the triennial be COMPLETED at least 6 weeks before your moving date. Again, this will insure that you can get signed copies of the review to take with you to the new school district.

Talk to your child's current teacher(s) and therapists. Ask if they could write a letter of introduction to the new teacher(s) and therapists which describes your child, his strengths, areas of weakness, and successful approaches to working with him. The new teacher(s) and therapists will be able to incorporate successful ideas into their programs immediately. Again, be sure to make this request well in advance of needing it, so the teachers and therapists have plenty of time to do this.

Has your child had a physical this year? If not, visit your current pediatrician and have this done at least 6 weeks before you move. Be sure your child is up to date on all vaccinations and regular "baby shots" and that you have a complete record from your pediatrician. If you use a clinic, public health system or Indian Health Services for medical care, be sure they have given you a complete record of your child's shots and a copy of the current physical.

If your child is taking regular prescription medicine or has prescriptions for any therapy, get copies of these medical reports. Be sure you have at least a one-month supply or more, if possible, of any prescription medications before you move so you won't have to find a new doctor, get an appointment and need a new prescription in the middle of all your other concerns. Make note of how long this medication will last so you can allow yourself time to schedule new appointments when you move. If you know you will need to see a doctor very soon after you move, try to make an appointment before you move so that will be settled.

If your child is seeing any specialists, such as neurologists, allergists or the like, also be sure you get a complete set of medical records from these physicians to take with you. Also contact your child's dentist and take those records with you.

You may want to ask your current doctor(s) for referrals to doctors or clinics in your new location. When you tell your child's doctor you are moving, ask for any information that may be helpful to the new doctor you will be seeing. Ask if the new doctor can call the current doctor if there are any questions or topics that need to be discussed. If you are interested in having your child's current doctor continue to be part of the medical team, discuss this option, too. You can keep the current doctor informed by sending regular medical reports so that he/she can consult with you and the new doctor about your child's needs and progress.

Q: ***What else should I do?***

<u>At the state level.</u>

A: At the same time you are checking and collecting all your child's records, get a copy of the "new" state's special education guidelines and policies. You will want to pay special attention to eligibility requirements to be sure you have all the paperwork you need when you arrive. Be sure to contact the new state as soon as you know you will be moving; it may take 6 to 8 weeks to respond to your request for information.

At the local educational level.
If you know which county you will be moving into, request a copy of any information they have on special education. Tell them you will be moving into their county and that your child is currently receiving special education services that you would like to have continued in his/her new school. Tell them the age of your child, the nature of his/her disability (learning disabled, mentally retarded, developmentally delayed, hearing impaired, etc.), and the services he/she is currently receiving, including any therapies or special transportation needs. Ask for information on eligibility requirements for similar services in their schools, and what records they will need. Ask if it would be helpful to send your child's records in advance and, if so, to whom should they be sent (remember, always keep copies in your home file). You can also request a meeting within the first week of your arrival in your new town. You might ask them about transportation arrangements so the bus will arrive when your child is ready to start to his/her new school.

At the local school level.
Your realtor should be able to tell you the name and address of the local school district office; if not, call telephone information in your new county and ask for the name and address of the local department of education, division of special education. If the operator doesn't have information on special education, you can either send your request to the local department of education and write ATTN: SPECIAL EDUCATION on the envelope, or phone the number of the local department of education and ask for the division of special education.

If you will be visiting your new location before you actually move, you may be able to get information on schools and medical facilities while you're in town. It is most efficient to meet with the special education staff when you've got all your child's records collected and up-to-date. However, if you have the time, it might be interesting to visit special education programs in the new school district, as well as talk to parent groups. You can identify parent and disability groups in your new location by contacting NICHCY and requesting a state resource sheet.

Q: *Why get in touch with parent or disability groups?*

A: Often families want to know the "best" school or the "best" program for their child. Obviously this is a difficult question, since one person's idea of best may not be the same as another person's. Often, talking to families who have children with similar needs can offer insight into the options. Parents can talk quite informally about what they like and dislike about the various programs, staff, and schools in a community. Parents can also talk about non-school topics, like day care, respite care, recreation, medical facilities and the like.

Even if there is not a parent group or disability organization for families just like yours, you may find it useful to talk to other groups. The opinions of other people who are using the same systems (schools, therapists, buses, etc.) can be very useful. Pick up local newsletters too; they have information on local news of importance to families concerned with disability issues.

Q: ***What about early intervention and preschool programs?***

A: There is a great variety of services available for very young children. Be sure to check with the new school system to find out what early intervention programs exist for children your child's age. If your child is moving from an early intervention program to preschool the changes may be significant. Again, inquire early and give details of your child's needs and current services. The NICHCY ***State Resource Sheet*** will give phone numbers of state offices in charge of birth to 2 years old programs and of 3 to 5 years old programs.

It may be helpful to talk to your child's current therapists and/or teachers to discuss what would be provided in the next age group. In other words, if your child is almost 3 years old, the program might change even if your family were not moving. By talking to the current staff you will have an idea of what to look for in the new school system. NICHCY's ***Parent's Guide to Programs for Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers with Handicaps*** may be helpful. Call 1-800-999-5599 for a free copy.

Q: ***What about high school students, transition and work opportunities?***

A: The current IEP should be useful in transferring information about transition needs and plans. If your child is in a vocational program, or plans to be next year, this may be a good time to have a vocational assessment done. Often vocational assessments include the observations of the people teaching/working with your child, so the comments of the current staff would be important. Conducting such evaluations is time consuming and would best be done before the move. The results will then be immediately available to help professionals at the new school determine the most appropriate placement of a student they do not know.

If your high school student does not have transition information in his/her current IEP, ask the present school special education staff to develop a transition plan in the updated IEP you will request before moving. Again, be sure to make this request far in advance of the moving date to allow time for the entire team to put together a plan.

If your son or daughter is within 2 years of finishing high school, it may be very useful to be sure triennials are up-to-date. Even when a student is nearing the end of his/her school years, a current evaluation is important in transitioning him/her to adult services and work. Be sure your child has had a triennial within the last two and a half years. If not, request that this be done before you move. The information collected will be very useful in planning new programs, and the people who know your child and have had experience working with him/her may be the best ones to conduct this evaluation.

Students who are working in work sites identified and/or supervised by either the special education team or community services board (or other formal job placement arrangement specifically for people with disabilities) will also require complete records of their work placement, work experience, accomodations, transportation and the like. Again, it may be very useful to ask the current work supervisor to write a letter describing your son's or daughter's strengths, needs, and most effective strategies for achieving success on the job.

There is a great deal of variation in work experience arrangements in different communities and different states, with different agencies delivering these services. When you contact the new school district, you will need to ask who is responsible for organizing work experience programs for students whose needs are similar to those of your child. When you contact that person, either in person when you arrive or by mail before then, be sure to pass along all the information you have assembled about your child's current placement.

Q: *What do I do about Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Benefits?*

A: States vary in the amount, or rate, of SSI benefits they pay and also in eligibility requirements. This means that one state may pay more or less than another, that a child eligible for SSI benefits in one state may not be eligible for any benefits in another state, or that a child who had been denied SSI benefits in one state may in fact be eligible for benefits in the state to which his family is moving. Depending on where you move, you may need to be interviewed by the local Social Security office, either in person or by phone. To find out about SSI benefits in the new state, call the Social Security national toll free number, 1-800-234-5772. (They advise you to phone before 8 a.m. to get through more easily.)

Social Security advises that families should not file for benefits in the new state until they moved and have an established address. According to Social Security, changing an address before a family actually moves can cause a lot of confusion if a family's plans change, which frequently happens.

Q: *What do I do if I need to move in a few weeks and don't have much time?*

A: Essentially the same things need to be done regardless of how much advance notice you have of a move. It is certainly much easier to get all this accomplished with several months time, but there are some short cuts.

All the records about your child need to be collected and duplicated. Letters from teachers, therapists and other professionals working with your child are very helpful and can be requested before you move and mailed to the new address as soon as possible. Updating IEPs, triennials, vocational assessments and the like may not be possible. However, you may want to talk to the people who would be involved in these evaluations and ask them to write you a letter explaining any changes or suggestions they would have for a new IEP, etc. Again, these letters can be requested as soon as you know you'll be moving and be mailed to the new address, when they are completed.

Instead of writing to the special education staff in the new state and school district, you may want to phone them. You can ask them to mail information to the new address, and you can request an appointment as soon as possible after you arrive. You may want to take a few minutes to briefly explain your child's current special education program, so they will know with whom to schedule your appointment. Rather than mailing records in advance, you can carry these with you (don't pack them) and present them at your first meeting.

Explain to your child's doctor(s) and dentist that you will be moving very soon and that, unfortunately, you were not given much advance notice. If your child has not had a physical within the past 12 months or is scheduled for any treatments, shots, or the like in the next month or two, you may find it useful to see the current doctor before you move. Hopefully the receptionist will be able to schedule an appointment. Also explain that you will need to have medical records forwarded and ask if you can pick these up when you come in for the appointment. If there is not enough time, you can request that the records be mailed to you at the new address. Be sure to fill all needed prescriptions.

If you are rushed with your plans, it may be more important than ever to make a notebook of needed names and phone numbers. Keep a record of the names and address of the people you asked to write letters or send information, so you can easily contact them if the requested papers do not arrive. List all appointments you make with the new school staff and make a list of the information they ask you to bring to these meetings. Don't forget to ask for directions to the place of the meetings.

Q: ***What if it's summer time, Christmas vacation or spring break?***

A: Clearly, it is much more difficult to reach the people you need to talk to if school is closed. Vacations can prolong the time necessary to reach the right people or get the records mailed.

However, school offices are generally open the months of June and July even when school is closed. You should be able to get records and information during this time. August may be the most difficult month, since this is when many offices close for vacation. It would be good to try to reach all school people before or after August.

Parent groups may also be less active in summer or during special holidays. You can write or call, but it may take longer to get a response. Don't give up; they'll be back to business by September or after the holiday.

If you are looking for teachers or therapists in your new location during the summer, many school districts will not give out their home addresses. However, you can send a letter stating your needs to the new school and call to ask them to forward it to the teacher or therapist's home. In your letter you might ask the teacher or therapist to call you and give your home number.

Q: ***What if we are a military family?***

A: Essentially the same information applies to families in the military who are moving within the United States. There are people who can offer help specifically to military families. If you are with the Army, you can visit the Army Community Services Center; if you are with the Navy or Marine Corps, you can talk to the Family Service Center. If you are with the Air Force, contact the Family Support Center. These centers can assist you with identifying resources in your new community and may be able to help you in collecting school and medical records.

Talking to a parent group or disability organization of families like yours may be useful. There is also a parent organization just for military families. ***Specialized Training of Military Parents (STOMP)***, can provide military families with information about their rights and responsibilities for achieving appropriate educational services for their children wherever they may be located in the U.S. or overseas. There are two offices: STOMP PROJECT, PAVE, 12208 Pacific Highway S.W., Tacoma. WA 98499, (206) 588-1741 and STOMP PROJECT, ARC Georgia, 1851 Ram Runway, Suite 104, College Park, GA 30337, (404) 761-3150.

If you are moving overseas or returning to the U.S. from overseas, the same centers will have information. The Department of Defense, Department of Dependents Schools, has education specialists on staff to answer questions. You can contact them at 2461 Eisenhower Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22331-1100, (703) 325-7810.

Q: ***What do I do with all these records?***

A: Duplicate them. Make sure you have at least two full sets of records and information on your child. You will need to give records to the new school and you should always be sure to maintain a complete set of records for your personal files. When you need more copies of records, you can use your file to make them. NEVER give away the only copy of any piece of information. When you leave a school district, they will not maintain a file on your child forever; at some point these records will be discarded.

Q: ***Should I mail the records to the new school?***

A: If you have successfully contacted the new school system staff and arranged for eligibily and placement meetings, you may want to arrange for official school records to be sent to to your contact person. This could give you a headstart on identifying the most appropriate educational program. Again, the goal is to smooth the way for transition into the new school and the more information the new school has about your child and his/her needs, the better.

If you do not yet know who will be handling your child's special education needs, you may want to carry the records with you and personally deliver them at your first meeting with the new school staff. Generally, schools will need original records, but copies can be delivered for use until the official transcripts arrive.

If you do decide to mail records in advance, be sure you keep a complete set of the records for your personal files. You may need to provide information to other people, like doctors or therapists, and you will then be able to make duplicates of your file copies.

Q: ***Should I pack the records?***

A: It would be a good idea to hand carry your child's current records, like this year's IEP and medical papers, with you. Packed boxes may take time to arrive and unpack and the goal is to meet with the staff of the new school as soon as you arrive to facilitate placement. So buy a large sturdy forlder which closes securely and use this to transport your child's records.

You can pack records from past years. These probably won't be as immediately important. However, medical records should be kept handy in case of any emergency, so make sure you label the box that contains these records.

Q: ***How do I keep all these records, meetings, eligibility requirements and letters straight?***

A: Buy a spiral or looseleaf notebook to keep track of all the things you are doing. Put the names, titles, and phone numbers of all the people you talk to in your notebook, along with a few lines about what you discussed and any recommendations that were made. It may be difficult to remember all the new names at first, and this will help you keep your information straight. You can also use this notebook for appointments, directions, and reminders of topics or questions you want to discuss.

Since appointments and meetings will be held in a town you may not be familiar with, it might be a good idea to ask for directions to the meeting place. You can put these directions into the notebook so you'll have them next to the notes about the meeting.

Q: ***How long will it take to get my child settled into the new school?***

A: This is another hard question to answer. With careful preplanning, the new school district should be able to arrange for an interim placement immediately. They may want to administer some of their own evaluation tests and certainly will want to develop a new IEP. However, in the meantime, the current IEP can be used to avoid an interruption in school.

You should inquire about transportation and visit the new school as soon as you can. You can call the new school and schedule a time to observe; at the same time, schedule a half hour or so to introduce yourself to the new teacher. Establishing a positive relationship with the new staff is always helpful. Let them know that you are interested in working with them to arrange for a successful placement and that you are available to discuss any questions or concerns they may have. Again, the old school will need to send <u>original records</u>. Give them letters and/or reports from the former teachers and therapists, and be sure to keep copies for your files.

Q: ***What if there are problems, if my child's placement is delayed, or if I disagree with the placement?***

A: Any time you have concerns about any aspect of your child's special education program, there are established methods for addressing your concerns. Talk to your child's teacher and the special education staff to arrange for a meeting. You may want to review your child's IEP, review progress to date, discuss additional evaluations, request curricula specialists to review your child's progress, etc.

The information provided by the new state should include guidelines for addressing problems. Follow these guidelines. This is also an occasion to contact the parent and/or disability organizations in your new location. They, too, may be able to offer suggestions on effectively addressing the concerns you have.

CHECK LIST

Use this list to check off each task that you need to complete. Just cross out any tasks that don't apply to your family.

- ✎ ____ ☞ Get a notebook to keep track of everything you've done or will need to do.
- ✎ ____ ☞ Give your child's current school your new address.
- ✎ ____ ☞ Find out if all school records are up to date.
- ✎ ____ ☞ Request copies of all information in your child's files; be sure all evaluations, assessments, reports, IEPs, therapist's reports, and any related documents are there.
- ✎ ____ ☞ Request updates on any school records that need it (IEPs, triennials, vocational assessment, transition plans, etc.)
- ✎ ____ ☞ Duplicate all school records. Your school may provide this service or you can frequently find duplicating machines in the public library.
- ✎ ____ ☞ Inform your child's teacher(s), therapist(s), employer(s), counselor(s) and other professionals working with your child that you will be moving. Ask them to write letters about their experiences with your child and any recommendations or observations that they have.
- ✎ ____ ☞ Call your child's doctor(s) and, if necessary, make appointments.
- ✎ ____ ☞ Call your child's dentist and, if necessary, make an appointment.
- ✎ ____ ☞ Request copies of all medical records, including those of any specialist(s) your child is seeing. Duplicate these.
- ✎ ____ ☞ Call the Social Security toll free line, 1-800-234-5772, to find our about SSI benefits in your new state.
- ✎ ____ ☞ Fill all prescriptions, so that you have at least one month's supply.
- ✎ ____ ☞ Contact the department of special education in the new state and/or local school district. Request information about policies, procedures and eligibility requirements, and request an appointment for the week of arrival in the new location.

✎ ____ ☞ Contact the new school, if possible, and arrange for eligibility and placement meetings soon after you arrive.

✎ ____ ☞ Contact local parent and/or disability groups in the new location.

✎ ____ ☞ Call NICHCY, 1-800 999-5599, if you need a State Resource Sheet for the new state. Let us know your new address so we won't lose track of you!

✎ ____ ☞ Get a large sturdy folder which closes securely in which to transport your child's records.

✎ ____ ☞ Put all records in a safe place so they won't be packed or lost (you could put them in the car right now or put them in your hand luggage).

✎ ____ ☞ Additional Tasks

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